



SANDY SUMMERS/DN

JEFF RAZ, a UNL guest lecturer, talks to a theater class Wednesday afternoon in Neihardt Residence Hall. Raz, an actor whose lives in California, spoke to the class about his-  
torical portrayals of Jews in plays and theater.

# All that Raz

## Visiting instructor confronts stereotypes

BY DIANE BRODERICK  
Staff writer

When artist-in-residence Jeff Raz first encountered what he calls "the Nebraska stare," he wasn't quite sure what to make of it.

The San Franciscan had been expecting a cultural difference when he began work in the Artist Diversity Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, but he didn't quite anticipate the reticent environment in which he would be teaching.

"There's a real culture of not being confrontational (in the Midwest)," Raz said.

In class, he initially found the reserved mentality of students difficult to handle during discussions of stereotypes and racism.

But Raz has returned to UNL every year since 1995, each time with success in these areas. In his

### Artistic Differences

An ongoing look at ethnic contributions to Nebraska state culture.

visits, he has tackled serious, campus-focused problems of race and prejudice despite "the Nebraska stare."

In 1996 he worked with a class to put together "Noah's Floating House Party," a play that examined how different cultures celebrate the holidays of Easter, Ramadan and Passover.

And in 1997, shortly after Sigma Chi Fraternity members were caught burning a cross, Raz and a class in the Teachers College composed "All Tangled Up" — a response to the incident.

That was where Nebraskans' affinity for avoid-

ing conflict first caught his attention.

Raz was accustomed to, and preferred, the "take-your-sides-and-slug-it-out" approach to dealing with difficult issues.

But that wasn't what he found here, even though class members included such opposing sides as a Sigma Chi member and a member of the Afrikan People's Union.

"A lot of people in class thought it wasn't a big deal," he said.

But others said it made them fear for their lives, he said.

Raz said he came to realize that a confrontational approach wouldn't have fostered an attitude where such open opinions were offered.

It gave him a new view on the best way to examine difficult topics.

Please see **RAZ** on 8

## Student playwrights showcase performances in festival

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER  
Senior staff writer

When Nita Ritzke looked at the pile of dead bodies at the end of "Hamlet," she thought, "What a waste!"

So, she took those dead bodies and brought them back to life in a play called "Dead Hamlet."

But "Dead Hamlet" actually starts before the beginning of Shakespeare's play. And with graceful parody and farcical wit, it explores the causes of Hamlet's tragic course.

The play serves as the anchor for a festival featuring six new plays.

The festival, which runs this weekend, is presented by the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance. It features staged readings of five plays, and three full performances of Ritzke's "Dead Hamlet." All the plays are written by University of Nebraska-Lincoln students.

The festival grew out of a playwright reading group that met last year

to read and discuss new plays.

The students in the group felt burgeoning playwrights in Lincoln lacked the opportunity to get their works in front of an audience.

"As a playwright, your work really isn't done until you see it performed," said Drew Sutherland, a UNL visiting professor of theater from California who is involved in the festival.

The students decided to organize a festival that would allow playwrights to present staged readings of their works.

Becky Key, one of the festival's playwrights, said the styles of the chosen plays are reminiscent of various Broadway playwrights. Audiences will recognize the sentimentality of Wendy Wasserstein, the cutting-edge drama of Sam Shepard and the satirical farce of Tom Stoppard.

"Dead Hamlet" will be performed every night of the festival. The production plays up the idiosyncrasies of Shakespeare's characters.

"What makes these characters interesting in Shakespeare's play makes



HEATHER GLENBOSKI/DN

THE FESTIVAL OF NEW PLAYS features works by Spanish graduate student Joseph McClanahan, freshman architecture major Scott Raymond, senior theater major Becky Key and theater graduate student Nita Ritzke. The festival runs Thursday through Friday.

them comical in mine," Ritzke said.

Another highlight of the festival will

be Key's "Bullet," which will be featured during Friday's reading. Based on

the killing sprees of Charles Starkweather and Caril Ann Fugate, the play provides a chilling look at the teenagers' relationship.

When writing the play, Key said, she was faced with the proximity of the events.

"I had to be careful not to step on any toes," Key said. "And if I could step on toes, whose could I step on?"

The excerpt that will be read Friday shows Fugate and Starkweather at the beginning of their relationship. In the scene, the audience realizes why the two are together.

"They talk about sex and killing people at the same time, and you're not sure whether there is a difference in their minds," said Ritzke, who is directing "Bullet."

Before "Bullet," Peter Taber's "Black and Whites" will be read. Tice Miller, a UNL theater professor and organizer of the festival, said Taber's play follows in the footsteps of Ken

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